

among them. Most of the young men between 884
twenty-five and thirty-five met there. Through the 573
winter months they met nearly every night, and
played the usual games of the countryside, 'nap'
and 'forty-five', often far into the wee hours. Other
groups through the community met like these men
and followed like pursuits with an equal zest.

At times, a custom somewhat more organized, 884
the 'gamble', unites them all. It often brings in 525
other young men across the lines separating com- 573
munity from community. As often as once a week,
a gamble is held in or near Rynamona. Each
household in its turn throws open its doors to the
card-players. Admission, usually a shilling, goes to
defraying the expense of a supper and tea for all
and goes toward the prize.

For the gamble is one of many sporting events.
The prize may be a turkey, or two geese, even a
young pig or calf. Elaborate conventions govern the
play, and the winner may count himself a proud
man. To be known in the countryside, far and
wide, as a 'great gambler' is a coveted distinction
proving shrewdness and skill. The country dance 535
is another such event, and still enlivens the country- 884
side in the winter months, bringing the younger 573
members of the communities together and provid-
ing honour for the distinguished. For 'a great
dancer' is as widely known. In summer, hurley, the 526
national game, has the same effect; and nowadays, 884
through the nation-wide organization of the Gaelic 573

526 Athletic Association, the 'great hurler' may win his
573 way to the admiration of all Ireland.
884

884 But at home, in the local community, the young
573 men remain what they are. Their distinction lifts
them not at all from their status. Their skills are
nothing more than proficiencies. The pursuits of
the subordinate generation are no more than 'good
times' that 'pass the time'. For, through no plan or
design, but merely through the force of the social
organization of values and behaviours, the activities
of the young men's cliques exert no larger role
within the community.

For the young men's cliques do not primarily
serve to knit the community as a whole the more
firmly. The difference is structural. The activities
of the young men unite them from farm to farm,
from clique to clique, even from one community
to the next. The integration of the young men
is a looser and less inclusive integration than that
the old men's clique performs, even though the
numbers ephemerally joined in gamble, dance or
hurley match are much greater.

888 For the old men's clique unites, in its controlling
573 voice, both young and old. The old men's clique
unites the old men in terms of their common indi-
vidual positions as recipients of the respect of the
community, and as heads, owners and commanders
of their family corporations. It expresses for the
community the same subordination of the young
men that is their lot within their families.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

ER6 Rural-Irish ER6

CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS 173

Mayo a ploughman would be called in to shake a woman at a difficult childbirth, presumably because it is he who prepares the ground and shakes the seed which brings new life to the fields. ^{It is stated that in} 845

Music, dancing, games and dramatic performances also played their part in the seasonal gatherings, and one may hazard the guess that the Irishman's passion for betting derives from this source. A ritual element, as in the wake games mentioned in the previous chapter, can often be detected, for example in the following account taken from the source quoted above. It describes a May game or pantomime from the Louth-Armagh border, modified survivals of which were current through most of the 19th century in the Slieve Gullion district. "On May day the figure of a female is made up, fixed upon a short pole and dressed in a fantastic manner, with flowers, ribbons, etc. This figure they call 'The May Baby.' Around it a man and woman (generally his wife) dressed also fantastically with straw, dance to the sound of a fiddle and entertain the people with indecent shows and postures, the figure at the same time being kept moving by the rustic maiden that supports it. These exhibitions cause great merriment among the assembled populace; women who have had no children also attend (some of them from a considerable distance) to see this figure and exhibition, which they imagine will promote fruitfulness in them, and cause them to have children. Money is collected, and when the actors and musician have received some remuneration the remainder is laid out in drink, and the evening passes by jovially." This magic pantomime was originally intended to secure the success of the year's crops. 536
527
796
842

Such rites and gatherings have gradually been suppressed or won over by the Church; and Sunday evening is now the favourite recreation time for dancing and games. Among the older games, hurley is most popular, and horse-racing has by no means lost its appeal although it has suffered like other amusements from commercial exploitation. On many a 517
526

517 sea-strand, hurley, horse-racing and games have drawn
 526 together large crowds at certain seasons of the year, and in summer there were also boat or curragh races. These have by no means lost their appeal: one may instance the gatherings at Omev Island, Co. Mayo. If bull-baiting, doubtless a relic of ceremonial bull-fights, is now dead, cock-fighting is still secretly indulged in, while the illegal "long bullets,"¹ played with a heavy ball along the roads of Co. Armagh and Co. Cork—a curious distribution, for I have not come across it elsewhere—is still popular, and though Wakefield seems to attribute it to English influence it recalls the skill of the Irish peasantry in stone-throwing. This was, legend tells us, one of the playful habits of the giants of old, and a phrase used of the Aran Islands—"quarrels usually end in stone-throwing"—would not be inapplicable to some Irish cities during the "troubles." In the Claddagh of Galway a favourite amusement, turned at times into its original use as "a mode of warfare," used to be casting stones with slings. "When a man was able to strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen, he was considered a good shot." O'Curry states that it was the custom of the ancient Irish to use a flat circular stone in warfare: it was carried in the hollow of the shield.

526 Games which have kept their seasonal character are still played at Hallowe'en, especially that known as "diving for apples." "Riding and shoeing the wooden mare" is perhaps no longer played, but we must repeat that it is rarely safe to speak of old customs as extinct in rural Ireland. It has more than once been my experience to come across habits and beliefs which were described as dead half a century ago. Certain
 534 toys should also find a place in this brief summary: there is,
 524 for instance, the "bull-roarer," a thin lath of wood with serrated edges which is swung round on a string so as to

¹ An interesting account of bullet throwing is given by Michael J. Murphy in *At Slieve Gullion's Foot*, 1941, p. 78. Both iron and stone bullets were home-made, and the writer describes how the latter were fashioned in "bullet-holes" resembling the ancient cup-marks mentioned above on p. 164. The game was also played round Dunleer, Co. Louth, fifty years ago, but in the Cork style, that is by overhand "bowling."

LAZY-BEDS

241 have been greatly accelerated in the eighteenth century, thanks
 no doubt to the stimulus of contemporary English practice, but
 it may well be that the custom perpetuates the prehistoric
 method of clearing the land for cultivation. The fact that burning
 the land was prohibited by various Acts of Parliament in Ireland
 would point to its being another abominable native custom, like
 ploughing by the tail. We have referred to the graffan as a
 [412] skinning tool of ancient lineage, and may add that in Devon
 and Cornwall the implement used 'in the infancy of the art of
 paring'¹ was a mattock or adze which also served as a clod-
 breaker. The 'hack' of the Pennine country comes to mind here.
 The flachter, the Highland equivalent of the breast-plough
 which became the standard English paring instrument, may well
 be, in fact, the ancestor of the breast-plough, and I suggest that
 it came into use for skinning the outfield before burning and
 planting. We know that outfield cultivation of burnt-over
 forest lasted in France, in the Vosges country, into the eight-
 teenth century, and the custom probably survived long enough
 in Ireland to be replaced by 'paring and burning'. This view is
 certainly in line with the other evidences of cultural continuity
 from prehistoric times. The customs of throwing the ashes of
 May Day and Midsummer bonfires into the fields and the
 mixing of peat ash from the hearth with the seed corn may be
 magical residues of the ancient practice of firing the land before
 sowing.

241 We shall describe in a later chapter the various methods of
 carrying manure to the fields: here we may refer to another
 412 simple implement which serves in the preparation of the ridges.
 This is the clod-breaking wooden mallet or mell, resembling a
 croquet mallet (Fig. 1). The subject of our drawing might
 have been taken straight from the Luttrell Psalter of the
 fourteenth century, but it is a mell which I saw in use in Co.
 241 Armagh a few years ago. Hurling sticks served the same pur-
 ● 526 pose in some southern counties,² and one wonders whether the
 Gaelic game of hurling evolved in this way by playfully knocking
 a rounded stone among the rigs. Patrick Geddes amusingly, if
 erroneously, traced the origin of the game of golf back to the

¹Loudan's *Encyclopaedia of Agriculture* (1851).

²W. Tighe, *Kilkenny* (1802), 182.

LAZY-BEDS

idle Scots shepherd who with his crook knocked a white sea²⁴¹
pebble into a rabbit hole among the dunes. And one recalls⁵²⁶
the theory that the game of cricket, with its 22-yard pitch, had
its beginnings in the English openfields among ploughboys
(players) and landlords' sons (gentlemen) who threw clods
at the ploughman's marking sticks across the chain-wide acre
strips completed at the end of a day's work. At any rate cricket
has not strayed far from the English openfields and village
greens, and in Ireland it clings to the larger towns and to the
English-settled areas along the east coast.

Among other implements for preparing the soil the roller is²⁴¹
probably of no great antiquity, though examples of wood or⁴¹²
stone are of considerable interest. Alternatively, flat boulders or
specially-built clod-slipes are driven over the ploughed ground,
the driver being carried along on the platform thus provided
and adding to its weight. I have seen the former in Co. Wexford
and the latter in Co. Down. In the west the breaking of clods
on the ridges is done by hand with a heavy rake (Fig. 1), and
the 'harrows' which were formerly pulled by the horse's tail
was a similar implement, a block of wood armed with a few
wooden teeth. Even the larger harrows were a source of amuse-
ment to visiting farmers like Arthur Young, 'more fit to raise
laughter than soil', as one observer put it.

The weeding and protection of the young corn were serious²⁴¹
matters in the days when a patch of oats provided a family with
its only cereal food. The tethering and herding of livestock were
universal habits, and hand-weeding was another task for the^[857]
young folk. O'Flaherty writes of Connacht: 'They go and
lie prostrate or sit upon the corn, to weed it with their bare
hands, leaving nothing behind but pure corn'.¹ Swedes are
almost invariably weeded and thinned by hand. Thistles grow-²⁴¹
ing in corn or flax are pulled with special pincers or 'clips'⁴¹²
made either of iron or more usually of wood, of a type which is
illustrated in the Luttrell Psalter. The very similar French
weeder known as Havre pincers were also used for catching
eels. Docks were removed with a heavy forked spud (Fig. 50).
There were other less arduous ways of inducing a bounteous
crop. The custom of placing a sickle in the corn-field at the

¹R. O'Flaherty, *H'Iar Connaught* (1684), 59.

HOME-MADE THINGS

figured in the economy of the farm or in medicinal and magical
lore would be an almost endless task. One recalls that a group
of Californian Indians practising a food-gathering economy is
said to have made use of 176 species of wild plants for satisfying
almost all their needs. A few examples of the survival of a
collecting culture in Ireland may be given, taken from various
sources such as Wood-Martin's pioneer work, but also from
folk-memory. From the roots of ferns were extracted oils used
in weaving, from those of the water lily, a cherished red dye, a
substance for tanning from tormentil roots, and ink from the
roots of flags (saggins). Bracken and wood ash were kept for
making soap, and the ashes of thistles were the perquisite of
the herdsmen. Large lake rushes provided materials for caulking
boats and churns, and phragmites stems for winding yarn in
the shuttle. Lady's bedstraw besides being rubbed on bee-skeps,
to attract a swarm, produced both dye and rennet. For cures we
have the carrageen or Irish moss as well as the moss growing
on crosses and other special stones, and a great number of
flowers and herbs. Yarrow, in Irish, is called 'the herb of the
seven cures'. But the sovereign remedy was the essence of all
wild flowers contained in what was euphemistically known as
'all-flower water', i.e., cow's urine.¹ We shall return to these
topics in Chapter XXI.

¹W. G. Wood-Martin, *The Elder Faiths*, 2, 183.

Note. Mr. A. T. Lucas has recently published accounts of hurling balls made of
cowhair (see *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 57, 99-104; 59, 78-81).

FIXED FESTIVALS

sometimes killed at this time, so that the animal slaughter may be a sacrificial substitute. 527
[782]

Although Christmas is the outstanding Christian festival of the year its traditional 'Twelve Days' of holiday are steeped in pagan lore and in folk practices relating to the winter solstice and the new year. In Co. Cavan I came across a custom known as 'blowing the Christmas horns' by which youths heralded the festival by blowing horns from hilltops. The burning of candles on Christmas Eve is a ceremony which involved divination as well as devotion. 'Each district seems to have its taste in colour. For example, in Limerick and Clare white candles are mainly used, while red and green are popular everywhere. In the Midland areas pink candles are sought, and in some parts of Dublin only blue candles will be taken. In Killarney nothing less than a 6-lb. candle will suffice for the occasion'.¹ On Christmas Day traditional ball-games were played, often between parishes, and near the coasts these meetings took place on the strands. [526] ●

St. Stephen's Day is in many parts of the country associated with the hunting of the wren, and the sport is not entirely extinct. It seems that some details of the ceremony, such as the rhymes which are sung, are of English origin, but the wrenboys often wore straw masks in the native tradition, and occasionally animal skins or horns. The wrens were killed beforehand by noisy and excited bands of youths, and carried on a holly bush or a decorated wooden tray on St. Stephen's Day (Fig. 87). The procession, shouting and singing the prescribed songs to the accompaniment of home-made skin tambourines, made its way from house to house demanding money or drinks. The wrenboy processions, despite their English rhymes, appear to be a degeneration of more elaborate performances of native origin which had affinities with the mummers' plays and which like them may have been attracted by the powerful prestige of the Christmas festival from their proper season of spring. At one time the wrenboy ceremonies involved much fertility symbolism and were attended by men disguised as women.² The robin, linked with the wren in superstition, was also the object of persecution in south-western Ireland, but in this case the tail 527
825

¹Ireland (Bulletin of the Department of External Affairs) No. 303 (1955), 10.

²E. R. R. Green, *U.J.A.*, 9 (1946), 3-21.

OLD PISHROGUES

returned to its original position.¹ St. Olan's Stone is a boulder 823
bearing impressions which are regarded as being the imprint 755
of the saint's feet. Many such marked stones, including some 776
which are clearly artificial basin stones, have been regarded
with superstitious awe up and down the country and were
generally interpreted as the result of a saint's kneeling or
standing on the spot. It is natural to suppose that these hagiolo-
gical interpretations were substituted for another set of beliefs
which attached the virtues of strength, healing and fertility to
cup-marked stones.

Not infrequently cup-holes are found bored through thin 823
slabs of stones, and these 'holed stones' are invested with
aphrodisiac powers. We have referred to the ceremonies asso-
ciated with the Ardmore stone in Chapter XIX, and the practice
of erecting a stick or pole in similar stones at one of the major
festivals is recorded from other localities. Wood-Martin wrote
of the Hole Stone at Doagh, Co. Antrim: 'Marriage contracts
are still ratified at this spot, as country couples go there to 584
signify their betrothal by clasping hands through the hole.'
Again, 'at the holed-stone of Clochnapeacaib, county Cork,
women were in the habit of drawing some of their clothes 844
through a hole, when their confinement was approaching, to
secure a favourable result, and a similar practice is followed in
many other localities of women similarly situated drawing
clothes through the perforated arms of ancient Irish circular-
headed stone crosses'² (Pl. 15, 1).

Before leaving this subject I should refer to certain cup- 526 ●
marks which have been utilized down to recent times for the
purpose of making stone balls for the game of 'bullet-throwing'.
Played along the country roads, and now prohibited in Northern
Ireland because it endangers traffic, its main home is in Co.
Cork, where it is known as bowling. One will occasionally
surprise a game in progress in the Belfast hills or around Slieve
Gullion in Co. Armagh, and it is here that stone bullets were
manufactured within living memory. The 'bullet-holes', three
to four inches in diameter and an inch or two deep, are worn
in the flat tops of boulders in the process of hammering into a

¹P. J. Hartnett, *Béaltoideas*, 10 (1941), 103.

²Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 239-42.

OLD PISHROGUES

- 526 perfect sphere the rounded igneous pebbles which are selected for the purpose. One wonders whether some of the many cup-marked stones which turn up in the fields in certain districts—I have seen many in Inishowen in Donegal—were used for shaping stones, such as the sling-stones with which champion slingers, of whom the legendary Cuchulainn was one, performed their feats. The sling and the sling-rod were originally hunting weapons and probably instruments of war, and one of the last refuges of slinging as a pastime was the now vanished Claddagh, the fishing suburb of Galway, where a man was not reckoned a good shot until he could strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen.¹

- 312 Where a holy well has dried up—the usual explanation is that
824 it was desecrated and moved its position—the sanctity of the
778 site may be transferred to a tree. The so-called pin-well at Arboe in Co. Tyrone is a beech tree, hirsute with pins and nails, growing in the burying ground on a Celtic monastic site. A rag-well at Clonmel is visited by mountain farmers who hang rag offerings on briars at lambing and calving times, and afterwards place more rags appropriate in number to the increase obtained.² There is on the island of Inishmurray a wind-well which has the power of controlling the wind, the ritual being to empty the well to produce a calm. Sticks and stones also figure in wind-raising ceremonies, and ‘the rude stone image of Inniskea’ (Inishkea in Co. Mayo), which was dressed up in flannel each New Year’s Day, had powers of producing either storm or calm.³ Powerful magic was worked by a wooden statue of St. Macdara, formerly kept in his chapel—an oratory of early type with projecting *antae*—on an island dedicated to the saint in the extreme south-western corner of Co. Galway. Sailors passing the island dipped their sails three times in honour of the image, but we are left to guess what superstitions were involved from the statement that about the year 1640 ‘the bishop of Tuam caused it to be buried for weighty reasons’.⁴

¹U.J.A., 2 (1854), 164.²Béaloides, 15 (1945), 284.³C. Otway, *Erris and Tyrawley*, 107.⁴C. R. Browne, *Carna and Mweenish*.

14: Westropp B-4, 5 (no date) 1910-12
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Clare

708

Collectanea.

178 fires have been more numerous. Formerly bones were saved up
796 to crackle as they burnt in the fires, and even when this ceased
[1789] the pronunciation "bone-fire" continued. Magical rites con-
nected with milk and butter were, very recently, performed
secretly at wells on May Eve (April 30th) as described later.

• 526 Other annual observances were sports which first included, and
527 then lapsed into, mere races. The *iraghts*, or gatherings, at the
195 mound and inauguration place of Moy Eir (Magh Adhair) lasted
down to 1838, and were still very faintly remembered by old
people in 1890 as having died out in the Famine years, with so
much of the social brightness of the people. I may note that this
place,—the reputed seat of Adhar, a Firbolg prince, about the
beginning of our era,—became the place of inauguration of the
native princes of Thomond from before 877, and continued so
down, at least, to 1570. The name Magh Adhair (phonetically
Moy Eir) at first covered the whole central plain of east Clare, but
steadily shrank to that of a small tribal territory, and then, in
1584 and 1655, to the two townlands of Corbally and Toonagh
(Tuanagh-moyree). By 1838 it was attached only to two fields,—
"Moyross, or Moyree, parks,"—in the former, and is now confined
to a single field, "Moyars Park," and to the "rath" or mound
in Toonagh, across the brook. Notices of the inaugurations are
numerous from 1275 to 1311, and occur sporadically from 877
onwards. Other and less famous gatherings were at Creganenagh
("Fair or Assembly Crag")* on the bare hill over Termon in the
Burren, and at a field in Caherminaun near Kilsenora. The latter
probably gave the name Ballykinvarga, (Baile-cinn-mharghaidh in
1380), i.e. "head of the market," to the adjacent townland, and
may have been connected with the remarkable ring wall, girt with
a wide abattis of pillar stones, not far distant. Some forgotten
assembly is commemorated at Eanty ("Fairs" or "gatherings")
in the east of Burren. Other assemblages will be dealt with later
under XVI. *Patterns*.

XV. *Wells and Well Customs.*

823 Hesitation in questioning poor people too closely about their
religious feelings and rites has, I fear, rendered my notes on this

*Aenach was not merely a fair, but an assembly for merry-making, con-
sultation, etc.

226 many of them have lost their lives to the ocean. Islanders are well aware of the
181 wide differences in rowing and fishing abilities among themselves, and the evaluation of the skills of various men, past and present, is a much heard subject of
[46] conversation. Also, many men choose not to fish because they are unable to develop the requisite talents, are prone to severe seasickness, or are overly wary of the
• [524] dangers associated with fishing. It seems reasonable to assume that people who spend so much time on the water as a matter of safety will have learned to swim,
[831] but I was unable to discover a single islander who possesses this skill. The reasons
[524] put forward to account for the fact are several, but the most significant one never is broached—the puritanical reluctance to bare the body either publicly or privately at any age. Folk rationalizations are best summed up in the following quotations: "Nothing will happen to the man who knows the sea.", "Better for a man to drown at once and save himself the suffering.", "The man who can't swim will take more care.", and "When death is on a man, he can't be saved."

226 A recurring motif in writings about Inis Beag is the threatening sea and
165 heavy loss of life among fishermen, with its attendant psychological depression. In
181 the past century, only four sea accidents have occurred in the island with the loss
[82] of but 12 lives. The folk are extremely cautious out of respect for the elements,
[602] handle their canoes with remarkable dexterity, and are excellent weather forecasters. The claim of one famous writer that each family has lost male members
[502] to the ocean reflects not only his psychological outlook, but the breadth and depth of kinship reckoning and the high degree of inbreeding—as an islander told me, "Every Inis Beag family is related, and the drowned man might have been eight-
121 of-kin (third cousin) who died 60 years ago." The motif can be attributed to the projection of a tragic world view into the interpretation of the local culture by some authors, to the nativistic and primitivistic biases of other writers, and to a common sense conclusion reached by observers who have spent little time in the island and have failed to "count noses."

Diet

262 The diet of the islanders is simple, and only one large meal is eaten during
264 the day. After the turf fire is rekindled from coals and water is boiled for tea, the
252 family assembles for a breakfast which includes bread spread with butter and jam
212 and tea mixed with ample amounts of milk and sugar. Dinner at noon and lunches
[312] in the late afternoon and before retiring at night feature the same ingredients, although a boiled or fried egg usually is added to the dinner menu. The supper, eaten between seven and eight o'clock in the summer and an hour or two earlier during the winter, is the main meal when the family once again is united, and at this time boiled potatoes and vegetables, and meat if available, dominate the menu.
[56] Again bread and tea are served, and a dessert, or "sweet"—such as custard, rhubarb, blancmange, or biscuits—may be added. Children of school age in a family eat together at noon and after school and may be joined by their father, but his duties often absent him from one or both of these meals, and he may carry bread and tea

86 • THE VILLAGE AND THE FAMILY

especially outside of Ireland. Four islanders have entered orders—two priests and two nuns—and have brought their families not only prestige but an aura of sanctity; it is believed by the folk that God bestows grace on his earthly representatives and on their kin as well. Even the king is thought to receive some measure of supernatural support for the period of time that he spent during his youth, as is rumored, as a servant at Maynooth Seminary. 557
793
[555]

The folk rank one another according to their ability to row the *curach*, fish, farm, knit, and perform other economic tasks, although such talents do not bring the prestige that they once did. I often have heard individuals chaffed publicly, sometimes even to their faces, for possessing less than average skills, and many persons have told me privately that they admire or envy the skills of others and wish that they themselves were more adept. A man who owns land in the quarter of another village told me that he works painstakingly in setting a garden there, since his efforts will be appraised by the alien villagers and pitilessly condemned if found wanting. Women gain most of their prestige through performing well the tasks ascribed to them by the division of labor. The economic skills of individuals who lived in the past are lauded more than those of contemporary islanders, reflecting the shift of emphasis in the prestige system; this is far more the case with singing, dancing, and storytelling, as well as with the display of strength and courage. Institutionalized storytelling had disappeared from Inis Beag before 1960, although raconteurs of note still hold forth in the pubs and at small social gatherings. These persons, and the several who excel at singing and dancing, are held in high repute. Probably the best liked of the islanders is a man of 72 years who is admired for his wit, charm, friendliness, and agile step dancing. When drinking in the pubs, he enjoys telling anecdotes about his past experiences, singing and dancing, expressing a simulated sadness at his bachelor estate, and poking sly fun at the behavior of certain folk. Although he is landless and thought to be overly lazy, he is ranked high in the prestige hierarchy because of his esthetic talents and occasional *joie de vivre*. His recluse brother of opposite temperament remarked sadly, "Even the stones of the island know him, but no one knows me." Another landless man, now deceased, who was about the same age, enjoyed high status because he was a traditional storyteller, was noted as a young man for his exceptional strength and athletic and rowing prowess, had spent a decade in the United States, and by reading had educated himself well above the level of most of the folk. 554
555
[178]
[241]
[626]
554
461
[462]
555
[538]
[178]
555
156
159

Stories abound concerning once famous men of strength and courageous deeds in Inis Beag and the surrounding region. These anecdotes are recounted more during the summer months than the winter ones, when tourists are within earshot and can be suitably impressed. Acts of courage performed by folk in the past mostly deal with mishaps which occurred to crews while fishing or traveling to and from nearby islands or the mainland. The feats of strength performed by former athletes—such as putting the shot, long jumping, and "throwing the half-hundred"—are well within the realm of possibility, but other feats usually are grossly exaggerated. Examples of the latter are the man who, grasping the base of the front leg of a chair in which sat a person weighing 11 stones (154 pounds), lifted it with one hand, also the man who raised over his head "with ease" a struggling opponent of 16 stones (224 pounds) in a pub fight. 539
555
181
[526]
[47]

555
• 526 struggling opponent of 16 stones (224 pounds) in a pub fight. A famous writer
181 claimed that he introduced into Inis Beag a feat of agility that he had learned in
[77] France, which consists of holding a stick in both hands at the knees and jumping
back and forth across it without losing grip; the islanders attest that this "trick"
was known locally for at least a century, and one man boasted that his father was
123 able to leap back and forth a dozen times in quick succession. My rapport with
the men was enhanced by the fact that I had been a weight thrower and lifter
and used to entertain them by putting a granite boulder, throwing a discus that
I had brought with me, and performing repetition presses with a barrel of stout.
However, the one time that I was persuaded to compete for Inis Beag against Inis
Thiar in putting the shot (a flat-bottomed stone weight of 14 pounds), I fouled
with my foot all three times and thus suffered ignominious defeat. The curate who
officiated at the event appeared pleased, but the islanders who had placed wagers
on me were of opposite disposition.

JOHN C. MESSENGER

*831
562 recess play and movement to and from school. During church services,
834 there is a further separation of adult men and women, as well as boys
[858] and girls, and each of the four groups leaves the chapel in its turn. The
[864] pubs are frequented only by men or by women tourists and female
teachers who have spent several years on the mainland while training
and thus are "set apart" (and, of course, by inquisitive female ethnogra-
[443] phers). Women occasionally visit the shops to procure groceries, but it is
more common for them to send their children to do so, since supplies and
drinks are proffered across the same counter, and men are usually to be
found on the premises. Even on the strand during summer months, male
[484] tourists tend to bathe at one end and women at the other. Some swimmers
[526] "daringly" change into bathing suits there, under towels and dresses—
[291] a custom practiced elsewhere in Ireland which has overtones of sexual
[832] catharsis.
[184]

154 It is often asserted that the major "escape valve" of sexual frustra-
[839] tion among single persons in Ireland is masturbation; frustration-aggres-
[272] sion theorists, however, would stress the ubiquity of drinking, alcoholism,
[733] disputes, and pugnacity as alternative outlets. Pugnacity can also be
[578] linked to the widespread problem of male identity. Our study revealed
that male masturbation in Inis Beag seems to be common, premarital
83 coitus unknown, and marital copulation limited as to foreplay and the
584 manner of consummation. My wife and I never witnessed courting—
"walking out"—in the island. Elders proudly insist that it does not occur,
832 but male youths admit to it in rumor. The claims of young men focus on
"petting" with tourists and a few local girls, whom the "bolder" of them
kiss and fondle outside of their clothing. Island girls, it is held by their
[771] "lovers," do not confess these sins because they fail to experience
[626] pleasure from the contact. The male perpetrators also shun the con-
[783] fessional because of their fear of the priest.

833 We were unable to determine the frequency of marital coitus. A
considerable amount of evidence indicates that privacy in the act is
stressed and that foreplay is limited to kissing and rough fondling of the
lower body, especially the buttocks. Sexual activity invariably is initiated
[291] by the husband. Only the male superior position is employed; intercourse
takes place with underclothes not removed; and orgasm, for the man, is
[12] achieved quickly, almost immediately after which he falls asleep. (I
must stress the provisional nature of these data, for they are based on a
limited sample of respondents and relate to that area of sexual behavior
least freely discussed.)

000

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies,

Sex and Repression in an Irish Folk Community

Many kinds of behavior disassociated from sex in other societies such as nudity and physiological evacuation, are considered sexual in Inis Beag. Nudity is abhorred by the islanders, and the consequences of this attitude are numerous and significant for health and survival. Only infants have their entire bodies sponged once a week, on Saturday night; children, adolescents, and adults, on the same night, wash only their faces, necks, lower arms, hands, lower legs, and feet. Several times my wife and I created intense embarrassment by entering a room in which a man had just finished his weekly ablutions and was barefooted; once when this occurred, the man hurriedly pulled on his stockings and said with obvious relief, "Sure, it's good to get your clothes on again." Clothing always is changed in private, sometimes within the secrecy of the bedcovers, and it is usual for the islanders to sleep in their underclothes.

Despite the fact that Inis Beag men spend much of their time at sea in their canoes, as far as we could determine none of them can swim. Four rationales are given for this deficiency: the men are confident that nothing will happen to them, because they are excellent seamen and weather forecasters; a man who cannot swim will be more careful; it is best to drown immediately when a canoe capsizes far out in the ocean rather than swim futilely for minutes or even hours, thus prolonging the agony; and, finally, "When death is on a man, he can't be saved." The truth of the matter is that they have never dared to bare their bodies in order to learn the skill. Some women claim to have "bathed" at the back of the island during the heat of summer, but this means wading in small pools with skirts held knee-high, in complete privacy. Even the nudity of household pets can arouse anxiety, particularly when they are sexually aroused during time of heat. In some homes, dogs are whipped for licking their genitals and soon learn to indulge in this practice outdoors. My wife, who can perform Irish step-dances and sing many of the popular folk songs, was once requested to sing a seldom-heard American Western ballad; she chose "The Lavendar Cowboy," who "had only two hairs on his chest." The audience response was perfunctory and, needless to say, she never again was "called out" to sing that particular song.

The drowning of seamen, who might have saved themselves had they been able to swim, is not the only result of the sexual symbolism of nudity; men who were unwilling to face the nurse when ill, because it might have meant baring their bodies to her, were beyond help when finally treated. While my wife and I were on the island, a nurse was assaulted by the mother of a young man for diagnosing his illness and